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THE SERI INDIANS

By W J McGee.

INTRODUCTION

Salient Features

Something has been known of the Seri Indians (Seris, Ceris, Ceres, Heris, Tiburones) since the time of Coronado, yet they remain one of the least-studied tribes of North America. The first systematic investigation of the tribe was made in the course of expeditions by the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1894 and 1895; it was far from complete. 114

The Seri Indians are a distinctive tribe in habits, customs, and language, inhabiting Tiburon island in Gulf of California and a limited adjacent area on the mainland of Sonora (Mexico). They call themselves *Kun-kaak* or *Kmike:* their common appellation is from the Opata, and may be translated "spry". Their habitat is arid and rugged, consisting chiefly of desert sands and naked mountain rocks, with permanent fresh water in only two or three places; it is barred from settled Sonora by a nearly impassable desert. Two centuries ago the population of the tribe was estimated at several thousands, but it has been gradually reduced by almost constant warfare to barely three hundred and fifty, of whom not more than seventy-five are adult males, or warriors. 101 [131] 133 161

The Seri men and women are of splendid physique; they have fine chests, with slender but sinewy limbs, though the hands and especially the feet are large; their heads, while small in relation to stature, approach the average in size; the hair is luxuriant and coarse, ranging from typical black to tawny in color, and is worn long. They are notably vigorous in movement, erect in carriage, and remarkable for fleetness and endurance. 142 [147]

The Seri subsist chiefly on turtles, fish, mollusks, water-fowl, and other food of the sea; they also take land game, and consume cactus fruits, mesquite beans, and a few other vegetal products of their sterile domain. Most of their food is eaten raw. They neither plant nor cultivate, and are without domestic animals, save dogs which are largely of coyote blood. 105

The habitations of the Seri are flimsy bowers of cactus and shrubbery, sometimes shingled rudely with turtle-shells and sponges; in some

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HABITAT

Location and Area

131 Seriland, the home from time immemorial of the Seri Indians, lies in northwestern Mexico, forming a part of the State of Sonora. It comprises Tiburon island, the largest and most elevated insular body in Gulf of California, together with a few islets and an adjacent tract of mainland; the center of the district being marked approximately by the intersection of the parallel of 29° with the meridian of 112°. The territory is divided by the narrow but turbulent strait, El Infiernillo. It is bounded on the west and south by the waters of the gulf with its eastward extensions to Kino bay, on the east by a nearly impassable desert, and on the north by a waterless stretch of sandy plains and rugged sierras 50 to 100 miles in extent.

Tiburon island is about 30 miles in length from north to south and 12 to 20 miles in width; its area, with that of the adjacent islets, is barely 500 square miles. The mainland tract held by the Seri is without definite boundary; measured to the middle of the limiting desert on the east and halfway across the waterless zone on the north, its area may be put at 1,500 square miles. To this land area of 2,000 square miles may be added the water area of the strait, with its northern and southern embouchures, and the coastwise waters habitually navigated by the Seri balsas as far as Kino bay, making half as much more of water area. Such is the district which the Seri claim and seek to control, and have practically protected against invasion for nearly four centuries of history and for uncounted generations of prehistory.

Physical Characteristics

133 Seriland forms part of a great natural province lying west of the Sierra Madre of western Mexico and south of an indefinite boundary about the latitude of Gila river, which may be designated the Sonoran province; it differs from Powell's province of the Basin ranges in that it opens toward the sea, and also in other respects; and it is allied in many of its characteristics to the arid piedmont zone lying west of the Andes in South America.

In general configuration the province may be likened to a great roof-slope stretching southwestward from a comb in the Sierra Madre to a broad eaves-trough forming Gulf of California, the slope rising steeper toward the crest and lying flatter toward the coast; but the expanse is warped by minor swells, guttered by waterways, and dormered by out-

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133 the discharge from the waterways of adjacent sierras and buttes; they are commonly miles and frequently dozens or scores of miles in width, and the linear flow may range from a fraction of a mile to scores of miles according to the heaviness of the rainfall and the consequent dilution of the mud. Such sheetfloods, especially those produced by considerable rains, are characteristic agents of erosion throughout most of the province; their tendency is to aggrade depressions and corrade laterally, and thus to produce smooth plains of gentle slope interrupted only by exceptionally precipitous and rugged mountain remnants. A part of the sheetflood water joins the stronger mountain-born streams, particularly toward the end of the great storm whereby earth and air are saturated; another part forms ground-water, which slowly finds its way down the slopes toward the principal valleys, perhaps to reappear as springs or to supply wells. These with certain other conditions determine the water-supply available for habitation throughout Seriland and adjacent Papagueria.

Another condition of prime importance arises in a secular tilting of the entire province southwestward. This tilting is connected with the upthrust of the Sierra Madre and the uplifting of the plateau country and the southern Rocky mountain region north of the international boundary. Its rate is measured by the erosion of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado and other gorges; and its dates, in terms of the geologic time-scale, run at least from the middle Tertiary to the present, or throughout the Neocene and Pleistocene. Throughout this vast period the effect of the tilting in the Sonoran province has been to invigorate streams flowing southward, and to paralyze streams flowing toward the northerly and easterly compass-points; accordingly the streams flowing toward the gulf have eroded their channels effectively during the ages, and have frequently retrogressed entirely through outlying ranges; so that throughout the province the divides seldom correspond with the sierra crests.

A typical stream of the province is Rio Bacuache, one of the two [131] practicable overland ways into Seriland (albeit never surveyed until traversed by the 1895 expedition). Viewed in its simple geographic aspect, this stream may be said to originate in a broad valley parallel with the gulf and the high sierra, 200 miles northeast of Kino bay; its half-dozen tributary arroyos (sun-baked sand-washes during three hundred and sixty days and mud-torrents during five days of the average year) gather in the sheetflood plain and unite at Pozo Noriega, where the ground-water gives permanent supply to a well; then the channel cleaves a rocky sierra 3,000 feet high in a narrow gorge, and within this canyon the ground-water gathered in the valley above seeps to the surface of the sand wash and flows in a practically permanent streamlet throughout the 4 or 5 miles forming the width of the sierra; then the liquid sinks, and 25 miles of blistering sand-wash (interrupted by a single lateral spring) stretch across the next valley

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into the saguesa forests of the eastern base of Sierra Seri; on the east it is miles in breadth, passing gradually into the normal Sonoran plain; on the south it widens still farther, stretching all the way to Arenales de Gil and Pozo Escalante, and merging into the playa-like mud-flats bordering Laguna la Cruz, into which the gulf waters are sometimes forced by southwesterly gales at high spring tides. Throughout this portion of the desert, marine shells are scattered over the playa-like flats or lodged in the adjacent banks, sometimes in great beds; the vegetation is scantier than usual and largely of salt-loving habit; the mud-flats are usually coated with saline and alkaline crusts, while the dunes are soft and fluffy, and expand into broad belts perforated with the tunnels of the surprisingly abundant rodents. Across this plain of bitter sand-dust lie the two hard land routes to Seriland—the supposed Escalante route of 1700, down the fan of Rio Bacuache and thence by Barranca Salina; and the Encinas route, down the northern border of the Rio Sonora fan and thence by Pozo Escalante to the shores of Bahia Kino.[1]

Desierto Encinas is an impossible human habitat in any proper sense; it is merely a broad and hardly passable boundary between habitats. The hardy stock of the frontier ranchos, pasturing partly on the thorny fruit of the cholla, push far out on the plains, and are sometimes watered for short periods, under strong guards of heavily armed vaqueros, at Barranca Salina; yet the greater part of the expanse is trodden only by the Seri. Two or three ruined frames of Seri jacales and a few graves crown the low knoll near Pozo Escalante, and there are one or two house remnants near Barranca Salina; these are notable not only as the easternmost remaining outposts of Seri occupancy, but because they represent the only known instances in all Seriland of the erection of even temporary houses adjacent to water. Distinct paths, trodden deep by bare Seri feet, radiate from both waters toward the Seriland interior, but no traceable trails extend eastward.

The southern limit of Desierto Encinas is marked either by the broad mud-flats opening into Laguna la Cruz or by the coast of the gulf, the coast cutting the lower portions of the plain being accentuated by a sand-bank 30 or 40 feet high, against which the surf thunders in nearly continuous roar, audible halfway or all the way to Pozo Escalante. A Seri trail skirts the crest of this bank, sending occasional branches into

[1] Both the routes were traversed by the expedition of 1895, the former from the headwaters of Rio Bacuache to the upper portion of its alluvial fan, and thence from the abandoned Rancho Libertad on the lower portion of the fan across Desierto Encinas by way of Barranca Salina. In the northern crossing a light vehicle (the first to traverse this portion of the desert), drawn by four horses and aided by several horsemen, was taken from Rancho Libertad across the northern portion of Playa Noriega and thence up Arroyo Mitchell to a point midway between Barranca Salina and Johnson peak, and was brought back over the same route. The Encinas trail from Rancho San Francisco de Costa Rica was traversed four times each way by the same outfit, and once each way by the running gear of a heavy wagon carrying the rude craft (about 1,000 pounds in weight) in which the Seri waters were navigated, this vehicle being drawn by 8 to 12 horses, frequently changed. Typical aspects of both routes are shown in plate III, the upper figure representing the Encinas trail and the lower a distant view of Sierra Seri, taken from Playa Noriega, in the depths of Desierto Encinas.

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133 inner margin of the shelf is a sea-cliff, usually 30 to 50 feet high, of which the lower half is commonly granite and the upper half unconsolidated and recent-looking mechanical debris collected by sheetflood erosion. Sometimes the granite of the subterrane is replaced by volcanics; sometimes ancient and firmly cemented talus deposits separate the superficial mantle from the subterrane, as shown in the lower part of plate V; sometimes the line of sheetflood planation passes below tide-level, when the waves beat against the unconsolidated deposits in a deep embayment; sometimes the sharply defined planation surface ends abruptly at the sides of subranges or buttes shooting upward in the abrupt slopes characteristic of the sierra proper; yet this 10-mile stretch of coast is a nearly continuous revelation of the structure of sheetflood-carved plains and of modern marine transgression. The debris of the combined processes forms an abundant and varied assortment of bowlders, cobbles, and pebbles, whence the inhabitants readily derive their simple implements without need for studied forethought or manual cunning.

The long sand-spit terminating in Punta Miguel and the shorter one terminating in Punta Arena are the product of geologically recent wave building, and consist of irregular series of V-bars, backed by lagoon-like basins and enclosing considerable bodies of brine in the central portions; and the bars and basins become successively higher outward, in such wise as to attest the secular subsidence of this coast.

[361] [487] Several jacales are located on the higher portion of the southern sand-spit, midway between Punta Granita and Punta Miguel, while foot-paths traverse the flat and skirt the coast. Toward the terminal portion of the spit the sand is blown into hummocks, held by clumps of salt-enduring and sand-proof shrubbery; but there are no rancherias here, despite the fact that it is a natural point of embarkation—doubtless because no Seri structure could withstand the sand-drifting gales and storm inundations of this exposed spot. The more protected lagoons behind the outer bars harbor abundant waterfowl, within bowshot of shrub-clumps and dunes well adapted to the concealment of hunters, while the mud-flats open to the tide abound in clams and other edible things. The features of the Punta Miguel sand-spit are repeated with variations along the eastern shore of El Infiernillo; and

[1326] [361] Seri jacales, evidently designed for temporary occupancy, occur here and there, usually on higher banks above reach of the severer storms.

3. Tiburon island itself is apparently the chosen home of the Seri—

[131] a habitat to which the mainland tract is at once a dependency, an alternative refuge, and a circumvallation. Its dominant range, Sierra Kunkaak, mates Sierra Seri in its essential features, though the rocks are for the greater part ordinarily obdurate eruptives rather than exceptionally obdurate granites, as in the mainland sierra; accordingly the range is somewhat lower and broader, while the sheetflood sculpture, with its sharp transition into precipitous cliffs, is somewhat less trench-

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he defined (apparently on the basis of the Tenochio vocabulary systematized and published by Pimentel) as a distinct linguistic family with two dialectic branches,[1] viz:

IX FAMILIA.—SERI.

XXXIII. *Séri*, por los séris, séris, tiburones, tepocas, salineros, en Sonora.
81. 1. *Upanguaima*, por los upanguaimas, en Sonora.
82. 2. *Guaima*, por los guaimas, guaymas, gayymas, cocomaques, en Sonora.

Orozco's map assigns to the Seri family an immense area (recalling Villa-Señor's "despoblado") extending from just above the mouth of the Yaqui, northward to the thirtieth parallel on the coast, stretching inland nearly to Cucurpe, Opodepe, and Ures, and including Tiburon; the "Salineros" lying adjacent to the coast in the north, the "Tepocas" medially, and the "Guaymas" in the south, within this area. In elucidating the map he wrote, under the title "El séri.—El upanguaima.—El guaima":

The séris, a tribe inhabiting Sonora, forms, with its subtribes, a separate family. By their language, by their customs, and by their physiognomy, they are completely set apart from affiliation with the surrounding nations; and apparently they have lived in the district which they now occupy from times anterior to the establishment of the Pima race and its affines; their use of poisoned arrows recalls the Caribs of the islands, as well as of the continent, and it seems not unlikely, although very serious, that they are related to them. The séris, known also as Tiburones, a name derived from the island of Tiburon in the Mar de Cortés, which serves them as a shelter, considered as parts of their tribe the Tepocas and the Salineros.

The "Upanguaima" (a very small tribe occupying the Seri border) and the "Guaimas", as well as the "Cocomaques" were combined chiefly on the authority of Jesuit writers.[2] In describing the State of Sonora he further wrote:

The séris, bounded by the sea on the west, the Pimas Altos on the north, the Opatas and the Pimas Bajos on the east, and the pueblos of Rio Yaqui on the south, form the smallest nation of Sonora, but at the same time the most cruel and deceitful and the least capable of reduction to political organization. Hardly uniting with the smaller pueblos as at Populo and Belen, the rest of the nation engaged so constantly in cruel warfare that it was necessary to persecute and exterminate them. . . . Small as was the tribe, three divisions are known: the Salineros, extending to the confines of Pimeria Alta; south of them the Tepocas, nearest to the island of Tiburon; the Guaymas and Upanguaymas occupying the territory adjacent to the harbor of the same name, afterward added to the pueblo at Belen and blended with the Indians of Rio Yaqui. Ferocious and savage, they preferred to die in war against the whites rather than adopt their usages and customs; lazy and indolent, they so surrendered themselves to the passion of intoxication that mothers conveyed aguardiente from their mouths to the smallest babes. They are tall and well formed, the women not lacking in beauty. The poison with which they envenom their arrows is proverbial for deadly effect; they compound the venomous juice from a multitude of ingredients and fortify the compound by superstitious practices.[3]

[1] Geografía de las Lenguas y Carta Etnográfica de México, Precedidas de un Ensayo de Clasificacion de las Mismas Lenguas y de Apuntes para las Emigraciones de las Tribus, por el Lic. Manuel Orozco y Berra; Mexico, 1864, p. 66.
[2] Ibid., p. 62. [3] Ibid., pp. 282-284.

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101 UPAN GUAIMAS—1763; [Keutwig?]. Rudo Ensayo, p. 229.
UPANGUAIMA—1864; Orozco y Berra, Geografía de las Lenguas, p. 42.
1475 UPANGUAIMAS—1878; Malte-Brun, Congrès International des Américanistes, tome II, p. 38.
UPANGUAYMA—Synthetic form.
UPANGUAYMAS—1882; Bancroft, Works (Native Races, vol. I, p. 605).
UPAN-GUAYMAS—1890; Bandelier, Investigations in the Southwest, p. 75.

Possibly the name *Cocomaques* (1864, Orozco y Berra, Geografía de las Lenguas, p. 42), or *Cocomaques* (1727, Rivera, Diario y Derrotero, I. 1514–1519) should be introduced among the synonyms of the Seri, but in the absence of definite information it may perhaps better be left unassigned.[1]

Of the four tribes assigned to the stock, the Upanguayma have been
101 extinct probably for more than a century; the Guayma may survive in
197 a few representatives probably of mixed blood and adopted language; the Tepoka have never received systematic investigation, but appear to survive in limited numbers on the eastern coast of Gulf of California about the embouchure of the Rio Ignacio sand-wash; while the Seri alone continue to form a prominent factor in Sonoran thought.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

131 The most conspicuous characteristic of the Seri tribe as a whole is
648 isolation. The geographic position and physical features of their habitat favor, and indeed measurably compel, isolation: their little principality is protected on one side by stormy seas and on the other by still more forbidding deserts; their home is too hard and poor to tempt conquest, and their possessions too meager to invite spoliation; hence, under customary conditions, they never see neighbors save in chance encounters on their frontier or in their own predatory forays—and in either case the encounters are commonly inimical. The natural isola-
[186] tion of the habitat is reflected in modes of life and habits of thought; and during the ages the physical isolation has come to be reflected in a bitter and implacable hereditary enmity toward aliens—an enmity apparently forming the strongest motive in their life and thought, and indeed grown into a persistent instinct. Thus the Seri stand alone in every respect; they are isolated in habitat and still more intensely isolated in habits of thought and life from all contemporaries; they far out-Ishmael the Ishmael of old on Araby's deserts.

648 The isolation of the Seri in thought and feeling is well illustrated by the relations with their nearest neighbors (activitally as well as geographically), the Papago Indians. The Papago are much esteemed
[115] in Sonora as fearless fighters, always ready to join or even to lead a forlorn hope; yet when the expedition of 1895 was projected it was found no easy matter to induce the picked Papago guards quartered at Costa Rica to enter Seriland. They were ready, indeed mildly eager, for fray, provided it were on the frontier; but they held back in dread

[1] These names seem rather to be Yaquis, cf. Cocopa, Cocomina, Cocomaricopa, Kahua, etc.

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appear to form a fairly trustworthy basis for consideration of the Seri food habits. 262

On reviewing the constituents it would appear that the Seri must be regarded as essentially a maritime people, in that about two-thirds of their food is derived from the sea; also that they must be deemed essentially carnivorous, since fully five-sixths of their diet (84 per cent plus a share of the miscellaneous—chiefly scatophagous—category) is animal. The tabulation does not show the relative proportions of the several constituents cooked and eaten raw, but the best available data indicate that fully three-fourths of the ordinary dietary, both animal and vegetal, is ingested in raw condition, and that the greater part of the remaining fourth is imperfectly cooked.

In recapitulating the devices for food-getting, it is found that nearly all of the more distinctive artifacts and crafts are either directly or indirectly connected with that primary activity of living things, food-conquest. Foremost among the distinctive artifacts of the Seri, in its relation to daily life and in its technical perfection, is the canteen-olla; probably second in importance, and also in technical perfection, is the balsa—whose functions, however, extend beyond simple food-getting; next comes the crude and simple, yet economically perfected, turtle-harpoon, with its variants in the form of arrow (with a function in warfare as well as in food-getting) and fire-drill; while the light basket-tray, although capable of carrying ten to twenty-five times its own weight, is perhaps the least perfect technically of the artifacts directly connected with sustentation. And it should be noted that the prevailing tools—hupf, ahst, multifunctional shell, and awl of mandible or bone or tooth—have either an immediate or a secondary connection with food-getting. 182

NAVIGATION

At first sight Seriland seems an abnormal habitat for a primitive people, since its land area is cleft in twain by a stormy strait—a strait whose terrors to the few Caucasian navigators who have reached its swirling currents are indicated by their appellations, "El Canal l'eligroso de San Miguel"[1] and "El Infiernillo"; for such a stretch of troubled water is commonly a more serious bar to travel than any moderate land expanse. This intuitive notion of the effectiveness of a water barrier, and the correlative feeling of the incongruity of a land barrier insuperable for centuries, is well illustrated by prevailing opinion throughout northwestern Mexico; for it is commonly supposed in Sonora and neighboring states that Seriland is conterminous with Isla Tiburon, i. e., that the mainland portion of the province (including Sierra Seri with its flanking footslopes) lies beyond the diabolic channel. Yet longer scrutiny shows that the superficial impression merely mirrors Caucasian thought and fails to touch the essential conditions, 131

[1] Hardy, Travels, p. 296.

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especially as they are reflected in the primitive minds of the local tribe; and careful study of the habits and history of the Seri shows that the dangerous strait has been a potent factor in preserving tribal existence and perpetuating tribal integrity. Naturally the factor operates through navigation; for it is by means of this art that the tribesmen are able to avoid or to repel the rare invaders of either mainland or insular portions of their province, the overland pioneers from the east being stopped by the strait and the maritime explorers from south and west being unable to maintain themselves long about the stormy shores and never outfitted for pushing far toward the mainland retreats and strongholds; while by means of their light and simple craft the Seri were able to retreat or to advance across the strait as readily as over the adjacent lands to which they were wonted by the experience of generations. In their minds, indeed, El Infiernillo is the nucleus of their province. So the Seri were among the lowliest learners of that lesson of highest statecraft, that lands are not divided but united by intervening sea; and their ill-formulated and provincial notions are of much significance in their bearing on autochthonous habits and habitats.

The water craft of which the Seri make so good use is a balsa, made of three bundles of carrizal or cane lashed together alongside, measuring barely 4 feet abeam, 1½ feet in depth, and some 30 feet in length over all. A fine specimen (except for a slight injury at one end) is shown in plan and profile in plate XXXI. It was obtained near Boca Infierno in 1895, partly towed and partly paddled thence to Embarcadero Apalrade, wagoned laboriously across Desierto Encinas and on to Hermosillo, conveyed in an iron-sheathed box on two gondolas of the narrow-gage Ferrocarril de Sonora to the international frontier, and finally freighted to the United States National Museum, where (in the Mall just outside the building) the photographs reproduced in the plate were taken.

The manufacture of the balsa has never been seen by Caucasian eyes, but the processes are safely inferred from the structure, whose testimony is corroborated in part by Mashém's imperfect descriptions. The first step is the gathering of the carrizal from one of the patches growing about the three or four permanent fresh waters of Seriland, the canes being carefully selected for straightness, symmetry, and uniformity in size; these are then denuded of leaves and tassels, tied in bundles of convenient size (one seen on Tiburon contained 40 or 50 canes), and carried to the shore. In actual construction the canes are laid butt to butt, but overlapping 2 or 3 feet, the overlap being shifted this way and that with successive additions, so that the aggregate length of overlapping in the bundle reaches 10 or 12 feet—i. e., the full length of the body of the finished craft. The growing bundle is wrapped from time to time with lashings of mesquite root or maguey fiber, and kept in cylindrical form by constant rolling and by means of the lashing; though the cord used for the purpose is so slender as to do little more than serve the purposes

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

[p.3]

THE SERI

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INTRODUCTION

The present paper is the first product of field studies made between January and March, 1930, in Arizona, Sonora, and Sinaloa, under a joint expedition of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, and the University of California. The financial contribution of the University was the gift of Mrs. Ethel W. Crocker. While the purpose of the trip was to define rather than solve problems, the following pages contain part of the positive observations obtained.

The Seri, who live on Tiburon Island, Sonora, in the Gulf of California, are often considered the wildest and most primitive tribe surviving in North America. They owe this repute partly to McGee's monograph about them, in the Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology. It is easy to read between the lines of this description that McGee leaned toward a romantic and imaginative interpretation of the Seri. Also, his actual contacts with the people themselves were brief, and hampered by imperfect communication. Moreover, the Seri have been for three hundred years in contact with Spaniards and Mexicans, part of the time even under direct mission control. It therefore seems doubtful whether their backwardness could be the result wholly of preserved primitiveness, and may not rather be attributable to a recalcitrant degeneration. In order to answer this question, and to place Seri culture at least tentatively among the other tribal cultures of the Southwest instead of leaving it as an unexplained and lurid abnormality, a brief visit to them was undertaken.

The success of this visit was due wholly to Sr. Roberto Thomson of Hermosillo and Rancho San Rafael, who is now the Mexican Government's *Jefe de Vigilancia* for the Seris, and in effect what in the United States would be known as Indian Agent for the tribe. He has protected and befriended them, kept them in turn in bounds, and secured some governmental assistance for them, under which they are making a beginning of adaptation to the modern world. At any rate, the mutual raidings and killings have stopped, and the Seri, though still very suspicious of most of the neighboring settlers and of strangers, look upon Sr. Thomson as their protector and friend. Without his introduction and experience, many less data could have been collected in a longer stay.

The Seri now live wholly on Tiburon Island. I was with them six days, half of them on the island. This is about as long a time as McGee spent with them—all of it at the cattle ranch of Costa Rica. McGee also explored the island and its camps at some length, but without encountering any Seri, who eluded his party.

Inasmuch as Mr. Edward H. Davis of Mesa Grande, California, has three times visited Tiburon to form an ethnological collection for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, I attempted no examination of Seri material or economic culture, which Mr.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

Davis has had fuller opportunity to investigate, but confined my attention to the social and religious sides of their life. There was the more reason for this since it is in dealing with these latter aspects, where verbal communications are as important as observation, that McGee's monograph is most tenuous and dubious. I also secured linguistic notes for the preliminary placing of the curious tonal speech of the Seri.

Seri culture in its present form is a fragmentary thing such as could hardly have existed under purely native conditions. Religion especially has suffered, no doubt under Christian influence, without many elements of Christianity having been taken over in exchange. Of mythology, only tatters seem to remain; of ritual, little more; only shamanism seems to be fairly well preserved. Nor, beyond the Spanish names for God and the cross, do the Seri give evidence of being or having been Catholics. The result is that they seem remarkably religionless. I do not know of a native people that appears so free from superstition and so unspiritual in its attitudes. Possibly I conferred with the wrong informants; but those I talked with seemed unsecretive. Social culture is better preserved, as is evident from a set of kinship terms that are numerous, precise, and untouched by Spanish concepts. On the other hand, there is little formal social organization. Whether this is also the result of a loss, is hard to say. The Seri may never have had sibs or clans; but the fact that they appear to lack them now is no positive evidence that they were without them three centuries ago. Shifts of residence, contraction of territory, shrinkage of numbers, amalgamation of distinct bands, may well have obliterated much of such social fabric as they once possessed. Games and the calendar are wholly native and intact, but taboos connected with sex, age, food, and the like seem fewer than among the backward tribes of the southwestern United States. It seems reasonable to construe this condition as the result of varyingly hostile, parasitic, and missionizing Spanish-Mexican contacts; especially when one realizes how overwhelmingly, though also spottily, this influence has affected the other tribes of Sonora—the Yaqui, Mayo, Pima, and Opata.

Historically the Seri are not a tribe but the consolidated remnant of a series of dialectically distinct tribes that once held the barren coast of Sonora from Guaymas to Puerto Libertad. Tiburon Island is the stronghold in which the mixed survivors, probably now numbering less than 200, have taken refuge, and, owing to its inaccessibility, drought, and poverty, have succeeded in maintaining themselves and their blended and reduced culture. Toward the interior, it is doubtful if they ranged beyond the present line of the Southern Pacific railroad, if that far. Orozco y Berra indeed assigns them territory up the Sonora River to Ures, on his famous map, which is still basic to all other ethnic maps of Mexico. But from Hermosillo

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

to Ures is good farming country, and why the only non-agricultural people in Sonora should have held this stretch, is hard to see. Moreover, Oroaco's bringing the Serian tribes so far inland as to abut on the Opata, severs the continuity of the American Pima Alto and Papago with the Mexican Pima Bajo, whose speech is almost identical. This identity is best understood as the reflection of a continuous occupation by the Pima of the whole foothill country from the Gila to the Mayo, between the Serian desert lowlanders and the Opata in their mountain valleys, with the Yaqui, Mayo, and other Cahita peoples replacing the Serians south of Guaymas where heavier rainfall and large flowing rivers made the lowlands attractive to farming peoples. The natural inland frontier of the Seri along the Sonora River would have been at the Siete Cerros, a low range some 25 miles, more or less, west of Hermosillo, where grass ends and creosote bush and giant sahuaro cactus soon become dominant beside mesquite. This boundary would have put the farmers on farm land, the roving gatherers into the succulently overgrown desert and along the food-stocked coast.

The Seri, then, in the wider sense, including the Guaymas, Tepocas, etc., were anomalous among the native peoples of Sonora in habitat as well as in culture. Now a similar country, almost waterless and cactus dominated, is the central segment of Mexican California. Here lived the Cochimi, dialectically the most divergent of the Yuman peoples, and with a culture similar to that of the Seri at least in its level. The habitat enforced a similar subsistence economy, unsettled living, scattering of population, inability of serious accumulation of property, and hence no doubt a relative paucity of most organizational aspects of culture. Whether the content of Cochimi culture was equally similar is difficult to say because of the melting away of the people. At any rate the question arises whether Cochimi and Seri are not historically connected, especially as both their languages are related to Yuman, whereas all other Sonora tribes are Uto-Aztecans. The connection seems the more possible in that southwest of Tiburon lies San Esteban Island; beyond that, San Lorenzo; and beyond, the great peninsula. The open-water distance nowhere exceeds fifteen miles. This is a difficult but not impossible gap to cross on cane rafts; and the Seri have skilful knowledge of currents and winds. The passage across the Infiernillo between mainland and Tiburon is little more than a mile at the narrowest point, but they often paddle five in their open boats to take advantage of weather conditions. The Seri remember navigating to San Esteban, and there is historical mention of crossings of the Gulf.

The final evidence for or against derivation of the Seri from Baja California will probably be linguistic, and if, as seems possible though doubtful, Cochimi speech can still be recorded in the peninsula, the answer may be definitive. The materials at present available

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

SERIAN TERRITORY AND TRIBES

The close speech unity of the Seri, Tepoca, Salineros, Guaymas, and Upanguaymas is affirmed by all the older authors. The name Seri has however been used in several senses, even in pre-ethnologic days: (1), for the entire group of related tribes, sometimes excluding and sometimes including the Guaymas; (2), for the inhabitants of Tiburon Island and the immediately opposite stretch of mainland; (3), for the inlanders more or less associated with the mission establishments from Hermosillo upstream, in contrast with the "Tiburones" of the island; (4), for the modern fusion of mainlanders and islanders, which evidently includes descendants of all Serian tribes except the Guaymas and Upanguaymas, who became absorbed in the lowermost Yaqui tribe or village of Belem. It is in this fourth and last sense that I use the term; my principal informant, in the tradition given, employed the third meaning; McGee mostly the second, with a strong implication of the thorough apartness and greater primitiveness of the islanders, as compared with their ethnic kinsmen.

The Tastioteños of my informant appear not to be known otherwise. The coastwise alignment of tribes from south to north seems to have been: Guaymas, Upanguaymas, Tastioteño, Seri or Tiburones, Tepoca, Salinero.

As already mentioned in the Introduction, it seems inherently unlikely that Serian territory extended as far up the Sonora river as Ures, near which Orozco y Berra puts the boundary. His undue extension is probably due to the fact that the missions to which Serians (other than Guaymas-Upanguaymas) became attached, were situated in the valley of the Opodepe or Horcasitas branch of the Sonora. According to McGee[10] these Missions were: Santa Magdalena de Tepoca, founded in 1699, soon abandoned, location long lost but probably up-stream from next; Nacameri, 7 leagues below Opodepe; Nuestra Señora del Pópulo, 9 leagues down, at Horcasitas; Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, 3-4 leagues down, maintained, with preceding, until 1767; Pitic or Pueblo de los Seris, more than 12 leagues down (opposite Hermosillo), founded last, in 1742. Nacameri and Pitic sound like Pima, not Seri, words. Whether the river valleys from Hermosillo up were actually Pima territory, as here surmised, will have to be established from documentary sources, possibly supplemented by recollections of the Pima surviving about Ures. It is conceivable that Serian tribes had driven the Pima out of the Sonora valley shortly before the founding of the missions, thus effectuating the division into Pima Bajos and Altos; or that the Pima shrinkage out of the middle of their territory began after their mis-

[10] Pp. 66, 69, 70, 72.

Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
NU31 Seri NU31

THE SAVAGE SERIS OF SONORA—I

By EDWARD H. DAVIS AND R. YALE DAWSON

000 us first acquaint ourselves with the life and habits of the Seri before the Spaniard trod upon his thorny land.

● 131 His homeland speaks first of isolation. Tiburon Island, in the Gulf of California, and the adjacent coast of Sonora are pro-

[142]
[291]
[283]

FIG. 1. CHICO ROMERO, SERI CHIEF
WEARING A KILT OF PELICAN SKINS WHICH USED TO BE THEIR ONLY MATERIAL FOR GARMENTS. NOTE THE CORD MADE OF HUMAN HAIR CARRIED IN THE HAND.

tected on one side by stormy seas and on the other by even more forbidding deserts. The natural isolation of this habitat set its people apart from all other human beings, and the two or three thousand Seris, wandering between their desert island and the mountain-

[p.193(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1960) 1945
MU31 Seri MU31

291

FIG. 2. THE PELICAN SKIN ROBE
A TYPICAL WOMAN'S GARMENT BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE COTTON CLOTH AND RAGS THAT REPLACED IT.

131 bounded coastal plain, lived a life so independent and so oblivious of the outside world that they might well have been on another planet.

182 The hard, inhospitable natural environment afforded by Seriland long ago moulded 105 the characteristics of its people and their whole mode of life. The distance between reliable food sources in the sea and supplies of fresh water created a pedestrian habit whereby they acquired a remarkable fleetness of foot and tremendous physical endurance against thirst and weariness on the trail. The monotonous sea-food diet induced a wandering, roving life in search of game and vegetal produce to supplement their meager rations. They became a homeless, burden-bearing people, wandering in family

[p. 194(A)]

S.Davis & Deeanne E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
NU31 Seri NU31

621 are four or five hundred people there, more during the peak of the season, and some fifty or more wattle and daub shacks arranged without plan or order, facing at every angle, but all near the beach on which the fishing boats land and are pulled up on shore. Refrigerated trucks carry fifteen to twenty-five tons of fish away daily during the height of the season, mostly the huge endemic totuava (Fig. 21). These great fish are dragged from the boats and lined up on the shore, where the heads are chopped off and the entrails are pulled out and left to be carried away by the tides or consumed by hundreds of scavenger gulls of the beach. A quarter mile
● [131] north of Kino is the present-day Seri village where nearly all the Seris now live semi-permanently because of the easy money and
[439] living. They have their own boats, fish a little for profit, and also bake the discarded
[262] fish heads for food. The Seri dwellings are now scarcely inferior to many of the wattle
342 and daub shacks of the Mexicans. Indeed, many of the Mexican shacks are built by
[439] Seris in exchange for manta cloth or food.

[p. 268(B)]

6: Monzón--1 E-5 (1952) 1953 NU31 Seri NU31

Seri Social Structure (1)

1. The material presented here was collected on a three-week visit to the Seri zone, the costs of which were defrayed by the I.N.A.H. [Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia], for the purpose of planning later investigations. It took place in January, 1952, in the company of Mr. Paul Finninger of M.C.M. [Mexico City College].

The permanent system of interacting influences that is presented among the Seri is of great scientific interest for its extreme characteristics of geographic isolation, environmental hostility, poverty, and the small size of the community.

The Seri occupy coastal territory in Sonora on the Gulf of California; formerly they covered a territory that toward the end of the 18th century, along the coast extended from Guaymas Bay, including it, to Punta Peñasco and, on the mainland, included the area in the vicinity of the present city of Hermosillo. They have been reduced little by little, now occupying only some isolated points on Cape Tepoca, Desemboque, and Tiburón Island, places from which, in spite of their inclemency, they are also being displaced.

Until some 30 years ago, most of the contacts of the Seri with Western culture had been warlike, ferociously defending their skins from the attacks of the yori (Mexican) invaders. Their contacts with the natives have been with the Yaqui, Papago, and those of Santa Rosalía (crossing the gulf). It was not until about 20 years ago, when the establishment of fishing camps was initiated with mestizo capital, that a new orientation in the treatment of the Seri came into being. Existing side by side with them at present are various Mexicans who exploit the products of Seri fishing, and some scientific investigators, principally from the United States.

They form enclaves in the heart of Aridamerica, with its cactus, shrubs and grasses, without flowing water, and with abundant flying and, especially, marine fauna.

7: Marroquin E-5 (1955) 1957 NU31 Seri NU31

Geographical Distribution

The Seri Indians live in two small Indian villages on the coast of the Gulf of California, State of Sonora, Desemboque and Punta Chueca. From there they frequently go to Isla Tiburón in the Gulf of California.

Approximately 35 Seri families live in Desemboque and 16 in Punta Chueca. Only in the first of these two places are there five "yori" (mestizo) families.

Sanitary Problems

The Seris have no defense against certain diseases which, like measles and flu, they acquire in their relations with the "yoris"; these diseases cause many deaths among the Indians. According to the ancient Seri Chico Romero, last Seri Governor, there was a great smallpox epidemic there about 1897 which caused the death of a third of the tribe which was living in Costa Rica, a small ranch on the coast of Sonora.

Seri Indian woman of Desemboque, Sonora. *Photo Henriette Yurchenco.*

In 1955 measles appeared among the Seris, with a great number of victims, children and adults; the actions of the rural teacher Leo Sandoval, the Linguistic Eduardo Mosser and of the sanitation authorities of Hermosillo, succeeded in keeping the mortality rate down; nevertheless, the number of deaths reached 5% of the total native population.

8: Ascher E-5 (1960) 1962 NU31 Seri NU31

Elsewhere (Ascher 1961) I have disputed this portrayal of the potential of existing ethnography, citing examples where qualitative and quantitative models have been constructed from ethnography and suggesting that one task for archeology is to codify the literature in a manner useful to itself. Regardless of doubts about existing ethnographies for archeological purposes, the worth of future ethnography for archeology will depend on the acquisition of the relevant kinds of information. Although discussion on the subject has been recorded (Tax *et al.* 1953: 229-232), no specific guides have been produced. This paper provides and discusses an example, which can be used as a paradigm, model, or guide of the kind of information to be collected from ongoing communities which would be of general value for archeology. The subject culture is that of the Seri Indians of Sonora, Mexico; the example describes a persistent trait complex associated with fishing for the Pacific green turtle, with particular emphasis on one trait in the complex, the harpoon foreshaft.

Example from the Seri Indians

The Seri, who numbered approximately 200 individuals in 1960, occupy a band of coastal desert about four miles wide and seventy miles long in the state of Sonora in western Mexico. The band extends along the Gulf of California from Kino Bay in the south to Desemboque in the north, opposite the largest island in the Gulf, Tiburon. Although the region is desert, with an estimated average rainfall of less than eight inches per year, falling mostly in July and August, it is comparatively rich in succulents and small land mammals. The Gulf forms a natural trap for large fish and marine mammals and is a breeding ground for the Pacific green turtle. The scantiness of fresh water has constituted, in the past and present alike, the single crucial limiting factor to agriculture and human occupancy.

In the past the Seri may have comprised from four to six tribal groups, and they were certainly numerically larger, with a maximum estimated population of 2,000 (Kroeber 1931: 53, 30). Until very recently they also occupied Tiburon Island, and at some more remote period they extended south, north, and east over a territory whose bounds are uncertain (Kroeber 1931: 5). On the basis of linguistic change, Kroeber (1931: 54) calculated that the Seri could have inhabited this general region for 1,000 years. It is uncertain whether the original occupation stemmed from Baja California via the Gulf of California or from the north and west via an overland route or routes (Kroeber 1931: 39-51). The first contact with Europeans occurred as early as 1540 (McGee 1898: 51).

In culture content the Seri are most closely affiliated with the Pima (Kroeber 1931: 51), but they do not share the practice of agriculture with them or with their western neighbors. The Seri are primarily fishermen; secondarily they gather the fruits of succulents; and to a still lesser extent they hunt game. McGee (1898: 214)

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1955)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

I

INTRODUCTION

The territory discussed in this paper is somewhat larger than the historical area occupied by the Seris. While Seri settlements are limited today to a quite narrow range, the Tiburon Island and the coast of Sonora immediately adjacent to it, they are familiar with a far larger region, owing to their periodic trips, either on their own after fish, turtle and game or, occasionally, in the temporary employ of the Mexican fish-traders and even farmers. The further away from Tiburon perimeter, the lesser their familiarity with a locality.

The area is limited by Hermosillo in the east, Punta Penasco and Porto Libertad in the north, and Nogales in the south, and finally it includes also the coast of Baja California which the Seris sometimes visit. It also includes all of the islands within that area, Tiburon, Patos, Rasa, Angel de la Guarda, San Lorenzo and San Esteban.

With very minor variations this entire region belongs properly to the Sonoran desert. *Palo Verde, Palo Fierro, Pithaya, Mesquite, Cholla, Sahuaro,* prickly pear, elephant tree and creosote bush are the basic plants. Among the vertebrates, such forms as the Sonoran bighorn, deer, cougar, jumping rat, badger, coyote, skunk, rattlesnake, sidewinder and Gila Monster are most conspicuous and diagnostic. Among the birds are the roadrunner, the raven, as well as many pelagic or littoral birds, the pelican and cormorant among them.

The region is one of very low rainfall, limited to the hot summer months, in some places occuring only a few times in a year. Winters are chilly and dry with persistent winds and dust, with the temperature falling down, on rare occasion, to just above the freezing point. Summers are intensely hot, with daily temperatures usually over 100 and the water temperature of the sea along the shore not infrequently as much as 85 degrees. There are great differences between diurnal and nocturnal temperatures, very much influencing the desert life.

Within this region there are several different ecological zones or perhaps sub-zones, varying from the alkaline flats like Playa Noriega, and the alkali-and salt-permeated soils of Desemboque to the more bountiful slopes of the mountains and the irrigated mud-flats around Hermosillo.

For the sake of distinction, I have selected several of the typical localities or zones as a point of reference either because of their ecological distinctions or because of their signficance as a landmark, readily delineating a peculiar habitat. Personally I am familiar only with some of the

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1955)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

II

[P6A]

OUTLINE OF SERI CULTURE

Territory

131 Historically the Seri territory at its greatest expansion extended from the coast of Mar del Cortez to Hermosillo and from Porto Libertad to Guayamas and included also the Tiburon Island. 101 Ethnically, the Seris represented a collection of [197] dialectically distinct tribes, the Guyma, Tepoca, etc., perpetually at war with each other, whose common characteristic was their culture, and who were framed in to the north by the Pima Alto and Papago, to the west by the now extinct Cochimi, to the east by the Opata and Pima Bajo and to the south by the Cahita, Mayo and the Yaqui.

648 But their area had fluctuated much. After the 131 bitter and disastrous wars against the Mexicans from the late 18th century through most of the 19th, the Seris lost out and were forced by the Mexican government to settle on Tiburon. This incarceration did not last long. McGee had already in 1894 found them on the mainland and Kroeber found them equally divided between Tiburon and Kino. In 1930 when he visited, evidently they lived largely in Kino Bay. As the Mexicans pressed on Kino moving in, in ever greater numbers, and as Japanese fisheries worked the Gulf out of Desemboque attracting the fish-loving Seris, their main settlement has moved once more. About 1940 most of the Seris moved into Desemboque and at the time of my visit, almost all of them lived [361] there while only two families made Tiburon their "permanent" camp. School and availability of the medical facilities as well as the location of the Mexican traders in Desemboque, part of whose scheme the Indians have become, attracted the Seris. Only occasionally today they roam inland or visit other areas, either owing to the hunting or fishing expeditions.

Numbers

161 Seri numbers fluctuated as much as their territory and had suffered immense diminution. I shall list the estimates below, indicating the source of the information:

	Authority		Source
1780	Velasco	2,000	McGee
1824	Troncoso	1,000+	"
1826	Ratio (Tiburon only)	1,000-1,500	"
1826	Hardy	3,000-4,000	"
1841	de Mofras	1,500	"
1844	....	550	"
1846	Velasco	500	"
c.1855	Encinas	500-600	"
c.1865	"	250-300	"
1894	Mashem, native	250-350	"
1930	Thomson	175	Kroeber
1934	Mex. En. Cifras	160	Ethn. Synth. Mex.
1953	Smith, Jr.	248	MS. Univ. of Ariz.
1955	Malkin	236	Malkin

10:Davis E-5 (1922-ca. 1939) 1965 NU31 Seri NU31

Section V

The Seri Indian

Unfinished Book Manuscript

War Chief of the Seris

The Pelican Skin Robe

175 131 Three centuries ago they were a friendly people living along the banks of the Sonora River from Hermosillo to where the flow of water sinks into the marshy banks along the coast of the Gulf of California.

175 197 The great Padre of the Pimas, Eusebio Francisco Kino, first visited the Seris in 1685, and found them "a very gentle people." After a short preachment to them he noted that "With very great insistency they begged me to remain with them and baptize them saying they would give me horses, fish and many products of the country, and that they would build me a house and a church. On three different days I said Mass in their country."

The Padre could not remain but two years later (1687), he sent Father Adan Lily to them. Lily established a mission---Santa Maria del Populo---on the banks of the River near what is now Hermosillo. The Seris remained faithful to the Padres when the whole country rose in revolt some years later.

175 [134] The withering hand of time worked against them, however. They were pushed farther and farther down onto the barren lands along the gulf coast until, finally, in a fierce and desperate retreat out into the sea and onto the desert Island of Tiburon. The swift and deadly channel between the Island and the Sonoran mainland gave them protection. They retrogressed through the centuries into a fierce and, perhaps, cannibalistic tribe.

114 [123] As late as 1922, when Edward Davis first visited Tiburon Island, a man was putting his life on the line when he stepped on the Island. But perhaps the quality of the man had something to do with it. As did Father Kino, Edward Davis was able to make friends of them.

The following manuscript is an incompleted book on the Seris which was found among his papers.

[pp. 6-138 not processed]

123 As a concrete result of that first trip to Tiburon, I secured a
115 *balsa* (boat) made of *carrizo* canes lashed together with native fibre,
581 which *balsa* Mr. Heye said it was the finest one in North America.

[226] This *balsa* was given to me without hesitation, although it furnished one or two families with sea food.

115 I wish to pay tribute to Senor Roberto Thomson who has been my constant companion, friend, guide and interpreter during the past twenty years, on all my trips to Tiburon and various parts of Mexico. I found him absolutely dependable, using excellent judgment in critical situations. He was honest, fair, intelligent, looking out constantly for my safety and comfort always, enduring hardships cheerfully. A better all-round out-door man I have never seen equaled. In short, he is a real *hombre*, and *muy simpatico*.

13 Tiburon, or *Shark Island*, long noted for its evil reputation as
181 the home of the most savage and treacherous Indians of North America,
193 lies in latitude 29°north and 112°30' west longitude, in the Gulf of California. It is shaped like a parallelogram about thirty-five miles long and eighteen to twenty miles wide, and lies parallel to the coast of Sonora, Mexico, of which, no doubt, at some remote period, it once formed a part.

It is separated from the mainland, for the most part, by a strait
[127] called *El Infernillo*, or The Little Hell, through which the rising tides pour a resistless flood. It is a desert island and supports a desert arboreal vegetation which includes several varieties of the cactus family and the *mesquite, palo verde, palo fierro, torote, palo blanco, ocotillo* and others. The giant *saguaro, sarbueso* and *pitahalla (pit-a-haya)* cactus are found here also.

Two desert ranges run lengthwise of the Island, which, on its westward or windward side, terminate in sea-worn cliffs against whose ramparts dash the heavy breakers of the Gulf, and on its eastern side, by long alluvial aprons from the foot of the mountains, sloping gently down to the lovely shell-strewn beaches. From this side the foot of the mountains lies from two to five miles distant. On this, the leeward side of Tiburon, the sea is much calmer, and often, in the early morning, it is as smooth and placid as a lake, reflecting each rosy, lavender and purple tint of the rugged Sierra Seri along the Sonoran coast, as in a mirror. The exquisite loveliness of marvelous sunrises over the pure limpid waters of the *Estrecho Infernillo* is mystical.

134 The soil is loose and sandy, unsuitable for cultivation, and im-
241 possible for producing domestic crops of any
142 Kind.

possible for producing domestic crops of any kind. There is no water for irrigation, and drinking water is very scarce, rising in only a few parts of the Island in places known only to the Indians.

For centuries these nomads of the wastes have borne an evil reputation as killers and cannibals, and many an expedition to the Island for trade or exploration has never left its beautiful shores. Lured away from their boats by friendly gestures of the Indians, every last man has been killed by arrow or rifle and the expedition never heard from. No survivor has ever returned to relate his experience and, up to the time of my visit, a man risked his life to go among the Seris on their Island.

Time after time, for four hundred years, the Spaniards, and later the Mexicans, have tried to exterminate them. They have been ambushed, hunted, killed on sight for years; diseases have decimated them; they have been the Ishmaelites among the native tribes of Mexico, with every man's hand against them. Now only a small remnant survives.

They have also taken heavy toll of those who have invaded their territory, which at one time extended from Altar on the north to Guaymas on the south, and from Hermosillo to the coast. When hard pressed, they retired to their Island sanctuary where, deep in the rugged ranges, they have defied pursuit. They are strong, brave, neither asking nor giving quarter in battle---men of marvelous endurance, tireless walkers, swift runners, wonderful trackers.

Within the last few years the Government has definitely set aside Tiburon as their exclusive home and sanctuary, with a strip along the mainland as their hunting and fishing ground, and where they can harvest the fruits of the giant cacti without fear of being killed. No person is allowed on this Island without special permission from the Governor of Sonora, or their Superintendent and devoted friend, Roberto Thomson. The Government has declared a permanent closed season on Seris.

As to the reputation of these nomads of the wastes of being cannibals, I quote the following extract from the *Life of Bill Fain:*

> After I had been in Yuma some time, a Yuma school teacher asked what I knew about Tiburon Island and the Seris. He said he had heard there was gold on the Island and he in company with a sailor intended to go down there. I said "Partner, I have been at the head of the Gulf several times, and interviewed many Mexican sailors and fishermen. These Seris are murderers and cannibals and my advice is, don't go, for as sure as God made little apples, you and your friend will make a fine feast for the *Tiburones.*"
>
> He said the sailor would manage the boat and they would prospect on the Island and pack the gold out. And besides, they were going unarmed and trust themselves to the tender mercies of the most treacherous Indians in North America. I told him, "My advice is to stay just as far away from that Island as you can, if you want to teach school any longer." My advice was thrown away.
>
> Some weeks later several mining men in skirting the coast opposite Tiburon, came across a place where the Seris had evidently been feasting on human flesh,

SERI BANDS

EDWARD MOSER

Mr. Moser, of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, holds a Master's degree in Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania. He has been doing research on the Seri language during trips to Sonora since 1952.

ABSTRACT

In previous publications on the Seri, frequent reference to distinct Seri groups points to historical tribal divisions at some level. Recent research among the Seri has determined the former existence of six bands which included three dialect groups. Three of the bands were subdivided into clans. These six bands, whose formation may have been caused largely by internal struggles, were eventually crushed and reduced to a single group by the devastation brought about by external conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The Seri tribe is located in Mexico along the coast of Sonora between Bahia Kino and Puerto Libertad, and on Tiburon Island (Fig. 1). Today it consists of approximately two hundred and eighty persons who call themselves *kongkaak*[1] "the people." Although at one time it was comprised of six distinct bands (Fig. 2), the tribe has now lost its band organization. However, much of the late history of these now-defunct tribal units remains vivid in the minds of the Seri. The purpose of this paper is to present some of the salient features of these former bands, to discuss certain interrelations between them, and to recount the Seri version of the disintegration of the band system.[2]

Three published studies on the Seri should be mentioned.[3] Of these, the reports by Kroeber and by Griffen are the more reliable. All three investigators mention tribal divisions which Griffen rightly designates as bands.

BANDS

BAND I *xika ?ai kkoii* "they who live toward the true wind"

This group is commonly referred to in the literature as the Tepoca or Salinero. As shown on Fig. 1, they inhabited an area which extended from a point slightly north of Puerto Lobos to Punta Tepopa on the south. The territory extended inland, encompassing the general area delimited by the San Ignacio River.

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FIG. 1. Area of Present Seri Occupation

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One descendant of this band states that long ago his ancestors wandered north from the region of Guaymas. Eventually, they established land rights to the coastal area extending from Campo Ona on the south to Puerto Lobos on the north. Before long, however, they relinquished claim to the area between Campo Ona and Punta Tepopa. [173] [167] [425]

It is to be understood, of course, that groups from this band, as well as groups from other bands, at times ranged far afield from their respective territories. Band I, for instance, had campsites as far north as the mouth of the Colorado River. [484]

642 BAND II *xika xnai kkoii* "they who live toward the south wind"
101 This group is commonly referred to as the Tastioteño. These
● 131 people roamed the coastal area from Guaymas to Bahia Kino.

BAND III *ta?eowkw kongkaak* "the people of Tiburon Island"

This band is referred to in the literature as the Seri or Tiburones. At one time their territory included only the northern and eastern coasts of Tiburon Island. Later it was extended to include the whole coastal strip of the mainland directly opposite the island.

BAND IV *?eno kongkaak* "the people of the desert"

The area this band occupied in the center of Tiburon Island is shown in Fig. 2.

642 BAND V *xnaamotat* "they who came from the direction of the
131 south wind"
173 The Seri believe that this band came originally from a region
628 south of Guaymas. It may have been the Upanguayma group
[101] mentioned in the literature. Its members came in contact with the members of Band II with whom they resided, apparently for a period of years. Whether the *xnaamotat* were Seri or non-Seri,
[197] I have been unable to ascertain. Since no informant suggests that this group spoke another language besides Seri, it seems reasonable to believe that it was simply a distinct dialect group.

642 The *xnaamotat* were a belligerent people and, after fighting
628 broke out between them and the members of Band II, they
721 traveled northward. Eventually they established themselves on
[131] the relatively small coastal strip located east of Punta Tepopa as shown in Fig. 2.

642 BAND VI *xika ?ast ano koii* "they who live in the mountains"

[101] This group, which has been recognized previously only by
[131] Griffen, inhabited San Esteban Island. It laid claim also to the greater part of the coast on the southern end of Tiburon Island. One informant stated that in earlier times this band had ranged over all of Tiburon Island except for the northern two-thirds of the eastern coast, but that they were slowly pushed southward by the movements of other groups.

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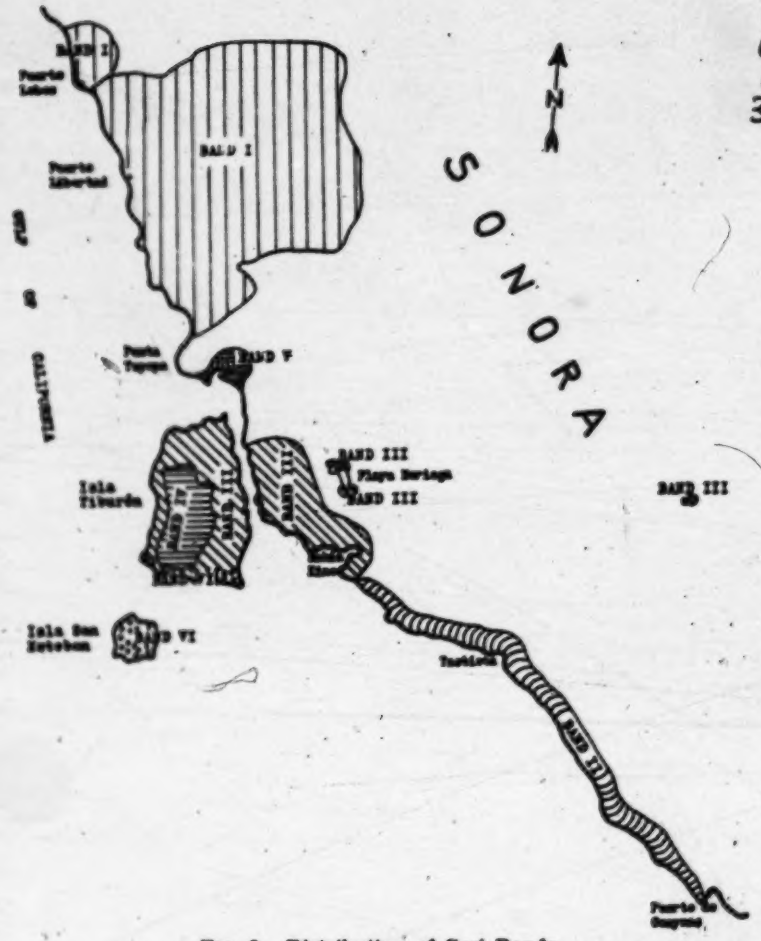

FIG. 2. Distribution of Seri Bands

DIALECTS

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The existence in former times of three distinct but mutually intelligible dialects seems evident.

Dialect 1 was spoken by Bands I, II, III, and IV. Any diversity of speech among these four bands seems to have been confined to word formation. The Seri language of today is derived largely from this dialect. [192]

Dialect 2 was spoken by Band V. This dialect is extinct and only scanty data on it can be gathered. From a number of expressions gathered, it appears that the dialect was characterized by extreme intonational contours. [194]

11: Moser L-5 (1956-1961) 1963
NU31 Seri NU31

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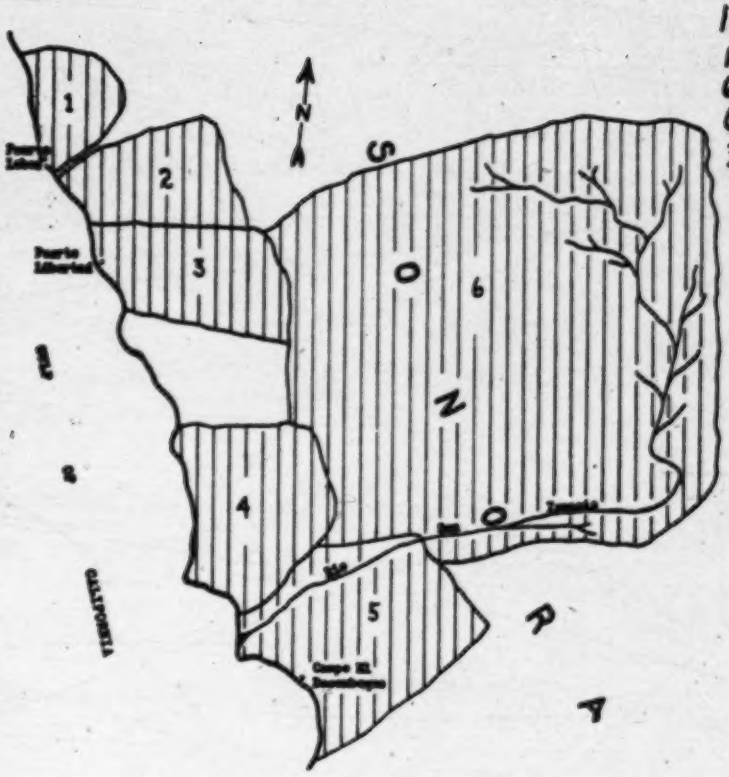

FIG. 3. Subdivisions of Band I

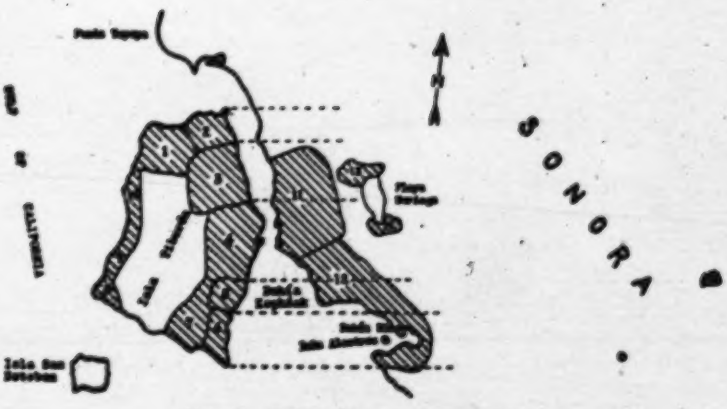

FIG. 4. Subdivisions of Band III

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621 Little information could be elicited about subdivisions 7, 8, 9, and 10. The reason for this might be that Band VI was slow in
[167] abandoning those coastal areas (if it actually did inhabit them)
[628] as it was being displaced by Bands III and IV.

621 The Seri say that long ago several men, called *?ant i?akimhoh*
642 "they who explain the land," came to Tiburon Island and told the
173 people along the eastern shore that they owned also a corre-
425 sponding strip of land on the mainland. Thus the inhabitants of
167 subdivisions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 laid claim to the coastal areas directly across the channel from them as shown by the dotted lines on Fig. 4. They assumed that their new territories extended inland
[922] to include as much terrain as they chose to claim. At first the people went to their mainland areas primarily to gather cactus fruit. Eventually some of them remained on the mainland and established subdivisions 11 and 12. This establishment superseded the claims of the five Tiburon Island subdivisions to their main-
[101] land territories. Although the mainland subdivisions 11 and 12 formed, in some respects, a separate band in their own right, they retained their name, *ta?eowkw kongkaak* "the people of Tiburon Island." Eventually this group returned to Tiburon.

621 Of subdivisions 13 and 14 which are shown on Fig. 4, very
642 little is known. The people of subdivision 13 inhabited an area
131 encompassing the northern end of the dry lake, La Playa Noriega
[829] (San Bartolo). Some of the Seri believe that these people were giants. Although in this area I have found clay figurines and other
[172] artifacts common to abandoned camps elsewhere, the Seri do not
[173] know the names of the camps of this subdivision. Subdivision 14 occupied the area surrounding the southern end of the same dry lake.

Subdivision 15 occupied the general area which is now Villa de Seris, a settlement on the southern edge of Hermosillo. As
[167] Hermosillo grew, it became increasingly difficult for these Seri to maintain their customary way of life, and they eventually returned to Tiburon Island.

642 BAND VI
621 Band VI became divided into four subdivisions, the names of
101 which are:

xnitom	"_____"
pahii	"flint"
kofte okl ifa	"large iguana peninsula"
koiih	"tubular"

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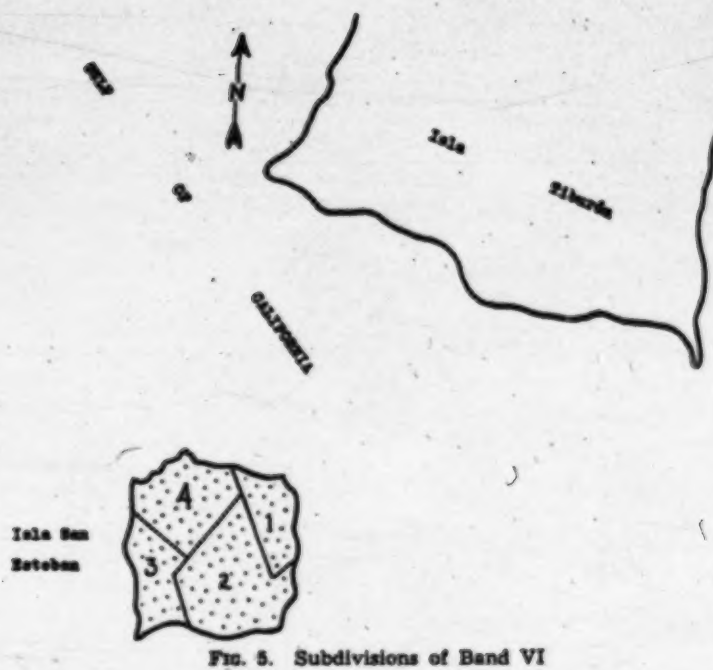

FIG. 5. Subdivisions of Band VI

BAND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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The social structure of the bands can be properly understood only in relation to the social structure of their smaller units, the *i?iziitang*. The kin group which resided in and dominated each such subdivision constituted a clan.[5] This group conforms to Murdock's three major specifications for clan designation.[6]

Murdock's first specification states that a kin group, to constitute a clan, must be based explicitly on a unilinear rule of descent. The kin group of each Seri band subdivision was based on patrilineal descent. An individual was closely associated with the group of kinsmen of his subdivision, all of whom were related to him through males only. The father was the head of his household. For example, he assumed leadership in marriage negotiations. Upon his death, the eldest son took his place.

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The second specification states that such a kin group must have residential unity. Seri marriages were exogamous with respect to the subdivision,[7] and the rule of residence was patrilocal. The domicile was set up near the home of the groom's parents.

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BAND V

These people were apparently hunters, gatherers, and fishermen. It is said that they speared fish from the shore since they did not use balsas. They too apparently raided the ranches. Their warring nature has already been discussed; it resulted in the acquisition of few friends. However, several marriages between members of this band and members of subdivision 2 of Band III are said to have occurred.

BAND VI

The members of Band VI lived on San Esteban Island and were the most primitive of the tribe. They lived in huts made of driftwood and in caves and made extensive use of the balsa. Although they did not have the bow and arrow, they did become expert in the use of the spear. The people depended mainly on a seafood, iguana, and maguey diet.

Perhaps it was due to the confined living space on the small island with the accompanying lack of fresh water that relations between the four subdivisions were precarious and fights broke out frequently. The Seri today stress the fact that the members of this band were impetuous and unpredictable.

Their relations with the other bands were generally good however. Seri from Band III were free to visit San Esteban where they were well treated.

The San Esteban people seldom traveled to the mainland, and, since they spoke no Spanish, it is probable that they made no peaceful contact with non-Seri groups.

COLLAPSE OF THE BAND SYSTEM

Internal strife in the Seri tribe was probably a major factor in the establishment of the band system. External strife was a major factor in its downfall.

Reference has been made to the plundering, killings and rustling of cattle to which certain of the bands were dedicated. The concern of the Sonora government was aroused, and steps were taken to crush the rebellious groups. According to the present-day Seri, military action by army units and rancher outfits against the various bands resulted in the near-destruction of the whole tribe.[11]

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[425]
[131]
[173]

BAND V

It was stated above that this band fought with Band II and then with Band I. Since Band V was likely killing cattle, they also may have been harassed by soldiers. Eventually Band V abandoned its territory near Punta Tepopa and headed south along the coast to a camp near present-day Bahia Kino. From this camp the entire group disappeared and was never seen again by members of the other bands. The Seri of today believe that Band V either traveled inland or was destroyed by a non-Seri force.

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BAND II

These people were rustlers and marauders. Government intervention in the situation was inevitable. The Seri recount the following final encounter between this group and the government forces.

The entire remaining membership of Band II was hiding out in a nearly inaccessible swamp thicket at Bahia Kino. Knowing that an armed force of soldiers and ranchers was searching for them, the people left their camp to seek safety elsewhere. Almost immediately they were attacked by the superior armed force which proceeded to wipe out the whole group. A youth who had avoided capture is said to have reported the affair to the Seri on Tiburon Island. This event may have occurred during the Encinas Wars fought from 1855 to 1865.

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[721]

BAND VI

The members of this band on San Esteban Island were little interested in the mainland and did not participate in the raids on man and livestock there. Nevertheless, they were to share in the severe punishment meted out to the bands guilty of multitudinous depredations.

Sometime after the massacre of Band II, a ship arrived at San Esteban, and many of the people were induced to go aboard. The rest of the inhabitants followed the ship to a camp on the eastern side of Tiburon Island where they were to receive gifts. As the people congregated, they were herded into a stone corral. Apparently, some of the San Esteban men were killed at this time. The rest of them, along with the women and children, were taken to Santa Rosa point on the mainland. Here, the Seri say, more of the men were killed. The remaining men were strung together by wire and led away, never to return.

The San Esteban women and children, along with some Tiburon Island women and children (of Band III), were taken in